

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL NO. 1324

92ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCED BY SENATORS DOLAN, CALLAHAN, COLEMAN AND SCOTT.

Read 1st time February 26, 2004, and ordered printed.

TERRY L. SPIELER, Secretary.

4624S.02I

AN ACT

To repeal sections 307.178, 537.600, and 537.610, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof three new sections relating to tort reform.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Sections 307.178, 537.600, and 537.610, RSMo, are repealed and three new sections enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as sections 307.178, 537.600, and 537.610, to read as follows:

307.178. 1. As used in this section, the term "passenger car" means every motor vehicle designed for carrying ten persons or less and used for the transportation of persons; except that, the term "passenger car" shall not include motorcycles, motorized bicycles, motor tricycles and trucks with a licensed gross weight of twelve thousand pounds or more.

2. Each driver, except persons employed by the United States Postal Service while performing duties for that federal agency which require the operator to service postal boxes from their vehicles, or which require frequent entry into and exit from their vehicles, and front seat passenger of a passenger car manufactured after January 1, 1968, operated on a street or highway in this state, and persons less than eighteen years of age operating or riding in a truck, as defined in section 301.010, RSMo, on a street or highway of this state shall wear a properly adjusted and fastened safety belt that meets federal National Highway, Transportation and Safety Act requirements; except that, a child less than four years of age shall be protected as required in section 210.104, RSMo. No person shall be stopped, inspected, or detained solely to determine compliance with this subsection. The provisions of this section shall not be applicable to persons who have a medical reason for failing to have a seat belt fastened about their body, nor shall the provisions of this section be applicable to persons while operating or riding a motor vehicle being used in agricultural work-related activities. Noncompliance with this subsection shall not constitute probable

EXPLANATION--Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in this bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

cause for violation of any other provision of law.

3. Each driver of a motor vehicle transporting a child four years of age or more, but less than sixteen years of age, shall secure the child in a properly adjusted and fastened safety belt.

4. In any action to recover damages arising out of the ownership, common maintenance or operation of a motor vehicle, failure **of a claimant** to wear a safety belt in violation of this section shall [not be considered] **be admissible as evidence on the issue** of comparative negligence. [Failure to wear a safety belt in violation of this section may be admitted to mitigate damages, but only under the following circumstances:

(1) Parties seeking to introduce evidence of the failure to wear a safety belt in violation of this section must first introduce expert evidence proving that a failure to wear a safety belt contributed to the injuries claimed by plaintiff;

(2) If the evidence supports such a finding, the trier of fact may find that the plaintiff's failure to wear a safety belt in violation of this section contributed to the plaintiff's claimed injuries, and may reduce the amount of the plaintiff's recovery by an amount not to exceed one percent of the damages awarded after any reductions for comparative negligence.]

5. Each driver who violates the provisions of subsection 2 or 3 of this section is guilty of an infraction for which a fine not to exceed ten dollars may be imposed. All other provisions of law and court rules to the contrary notwithstanding, no court costs shall be imposed on any person due to a violation of this section. In no case shall points be assessed against any person, pursuant to section 302.302, RSMo, for a violation of this section.

6. The department of public safety shall initiate and develop a program of public information to develop understanding of, and ensure compliance with, the provisions of this section. The department of public safety shall evaluate the effectiveness of this section and shall include a report of its findings in the annual evaluation report on its highway safety plan that it submits to NHTSA and FHWA pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 402.

7. If there are more persons than there are seat belts in the enclosed area of a motor vehicle, then the driver and passengers are not in violation of this section.

537.600. 1. Such sovereign or governmental tort immunity as existed at common law in this state prior to September 12, 1977, except to the extent waived, abrogated or modified by statutes in effect prior to that date, shall remain in full force and effect; except that, the immunity of the public entity from liability and suit for compensatory damages for negligent acts or omissions is hereby expressly waived in the following instances:

(1) Injuries directly resulting from the negligent acts or omissions by public employees arising out of the operation of motor vehicles or motorized vehicles within the course of their employment;

(2) Injuries caused by the condition of a public entity's property if the plaintiff establishes that the property was in dangerous condition at the time of the injury, that the

injury directly resulted from the dangerous condition, that the dangerous condition created a reasonably foreseeable risk of harm of the kind of injury which was incurred, and that either a negligent or wrongful act or omission of an employee of the public entity within the course of his employment created the dangerous condition or a public entity had actual or constructive notice of the dangerous condition in sufficient time prior to the injury to have taken measures to protect against the dangerous condition. In any action under this subdivision wherein a plaintiff alleges that he was damaged by the negligent, defective or dangerous design of a highway or road, which was designed and constructed prior to September 12, 1977, the public entity shall be entitled to a defense which shall be a complete bar to recovery whenever the public entity can prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the alleged negligent, defective, or dangerous design reasonably complied with highway and road design standards generally accepted at the time the road or highway was designed and constructed.

2. The express waiver of sovereign immunity in the instances specified in subdivisions (1) and (2) of subsection 1 of this section are absolute waivers of sovereign immunity in all cases within such situations whether or not the public entity was functioning in a governmental or proprietary capacity and whether or not the public entity is covered by a liability insurance for tort.

3. The term "public entity" as used in this section shall include any multi-state compact agency created by a compact formed between this state and any other state which has been approved by the Congress of the United States. [Sovereign immunity, if any, is waived for the proprietary functions of such multi-state compact agencies as of the date that the Congress of the United States approved any such multi-state compact.

4. Pursuant to the prerogative of the general assembly to declare the public policy of the state in matters concerning liability in tort for public entities, the general assembly declares that prior to September 12, 1977, there was no sovereign or governmental immunity for the proprietary functions of multistate compact agencies operating pursuant to the provisions of sections 70.370 to 70.440, RSMo, and 238.030 to 238.110, RSMo, including functions such as the operation of motor vehicles and the maintenance of property, involved in the operation of a public transit or public transportation system, and that policy is hereby reaffirmed and declared to remain in effect.

5. Any court decision dated subsequent to August 13, 1978, holding to the contrary of subsection 4 of this section erroneously interprets the law and the public policy of this state, and any claimant alleging tort liability under such circumstances for an occurrence within five years prior to February 17, 1988, shall in addition to the time allowed by the applicable statutes of limitation or limitation of appeal, have up to one year after July 14, 1989, to file or refile an action against such public entity and may recover damages imposed by the common law of this state as for any other person alleged to have caused similar

damages under similar circumstances.]

537.610. 1. The commissioner of administration, through the purchasing division, and the governing body of each political subdivision of this state, notwithstanding any other provision of law, may purchase liability insurance for tort claims, made against the state or the political subdivision, but the maximum amount of such coverage shall not exceed two million dollars for all claims arising out of a single occurrence and shall not exceed three hundred thousand dollars for any one person in a single accident or occurrence, except for those claims governed by the provisions of the Missouri workers' compensation law, chapter 287, RSMo, and no amount in excess of the above limits shall be awarded or settled upon. Sovereign immunity for the state of Missouri and its political subdivisions is waived only to the maximum amount of and only for the purposes covered by such policy of insurance purchased pursuant to the provisions of this section and in such amount and for such purposes provided in any self-insurance plan duly adopted by the governing body of any political subdivision of the state.

2. The liability of the state and its public entities on claims within the scope of sections 537.600 to 537.650, shall not exceed two million dollars for all claims arising out of a single accident or occurrence and shall not exceed three hundred thousand dollars for any one person in a single accident or occurrence, except for those claims governed by the provisions of the Missouri workers' compensation law, chapter 287, RSMo.

3. The remedy against any public entity pursuant to sections 537.600 to 537.650 for injuries, death, or property damage arising or resulting from the negligent acts or omissions of its public employee is exclusive of any other civil action or proceeding for money damages by reason of the same subject matter against such employee or the employee's estate. Any other civil action or proceeding for money damages arising out of or relating to the same subject matter against the employee or the employee's estate is precluded without regard to when the act or omission occurred.

4. No award for damages on any claim against a public entity within the scope of sections 537.600 to 537.650, shall include punitive or exemplary damages.

[4.] 5. If the amount awarded to or settled upon multiple claimants exceeds two million dollars, any party may apply to any circuit court to apportion to each claimant his proper share of the total amount limited by subsection 1 of this section. The share apportioned each claimant shall be in the proportion that the ratio of the award or settlement made to him bears to the aggregate awards and settlements for all claims arising out of the accident or occurrence, but the share shall not exceed three hundred thousand dollars.

[5.] 6. The limitation on awards for liability provided for in this section shall be increased or decreased on an annual basis effective January first of each year in accordance with the Implicit Price Deflator for Personal Consumption Expenditures as published by the

Bureau of Economic Analysis of the United States Department of Commerce. The current value of the limitation shall be calculated by the director of the department of insurance, who shall furnish that value to the secretary of state, who shall publish such value in the Missouri Register as soon after each January first as practicable, but it shall otherwise be exempt from the provisions of section 536.021, RSMo.

[6.] **7.** Any claim filed against any public entity [under] **pursuant to** this section shall be subject to the penalties provided by supreme court rule 55.03.

8. The provisions of section 537.067 shall not apply against any public entity or public employee acting within the scope and course of the employee's employment in any cause of action arising pursuant to the provisions of sections 537.600 to 537.650.

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